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THE BURDEN OF ENGELA

A BALLAD-EPIC

BY

A. M. BUCKTON

AUTHOR OF "THROUGH HUMAN EYES"

METHUEN & CO.
36 ESSEX STREET W.C.
LONDON
1904

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I give you Things, not Thoughts, the Jester said:
Things sow Seed of thought in a wise man's head;
And where it flowers again, my riddle's read!

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THE SUMMONS

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Waiting

Before the Dawn

October 1899.

THE stars are strangely wakeful after the sudden rain:
They seem to be listening, listening over the whole wide plain,

As if the wind had ceased on purpose for them to hear
A great World-whisper travelling, travelling through the air!

The gums are standing all like sentinels abroad,
Each on his own black shadow, down the bullock road.

There's not a hoof on the track as far as eye can see,
And the waning moon is setting behind the rubber-tree;

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And I lie awake, and listen in the wide and silent night . . .
There's something moving abroad that'll stand at last in the light!

I scarce dare breathe or name it—lest it should come more near,
A Thing that was born in cities, a Shape of dread and fear . . .

Piet, he sleeps like a child, lying close by me;
After the early rain, when the clay is up to your knee,
He comes in weary enough, and slumbers heavily!

But once he started to-night, muttering fierce and low,
And called me soft, as he used by the thorn-bush, long ago,

When I was a girl in my teens, and he with scarce a beard,
Whistling to me at sunset, after kraaling the herd—

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"Engela! Engela! come!" and he threw up
his naked arm;
But I put out my hand, and he sighed; and let
me cover him warm;

For the nights are chilly yet, though summer
comes apace;
The early bloom's long over about the orchard-
place.

I see from my bed, as I lie, the fruit will be
swelling soon:
The trees are grey as frost out under the
glimmering moon.

I hear the sheep a-stirring, yon in the open
kraal,
And the far-off raving voice of a swollen water-
fall . . .
And not another sound in the silent night at
all!

The stars are white and wakeful after the day's
long rain,
As if the earth were listening, over the whole
wide plain!

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Noon

I've sent young Rhaba back to the washing-tub
once more:
That girl is always hanging about the stable-
door!

The Kaffirs are gloomy enough, spanning in
the steer;
Old Jan has got some news, but I do not want
to hear.

Piet will tell me himself, when the time has
come to tell;
He never made sport of words, and what he
knows—he knows well!

Nonnie looks into my face with a wild and
wistful look:
She's but a stripling lass, but she reads my
thoughts like a book.

She's taken the little ones out to the waggon-
shed to play;
The sun is blazing hot in the middle of the
day!

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There's not a shade in sight; and every bush
and tree,
Like the winking stars last night, looks strangely
still to me!

As if it were travelling—O God! by day as well
as by night—
The word that comes from the dark, to stand at
last in the light!

A man might stop it yet! one that has power
with God!
One that could wrestle with Him, and stay the
lifted rod!

A man, and his single word might heal the
quarrel yet,
And bring to noisy councils the Powers that
they forget!

O, a woman's hand would stop it—the passion,
hurrying fast,
To tear the bleeding wounds of a newly-covered
past.

My soul is filled with crying, O take this dread
away!
And thousands of hearts are praying the same
thing night and day.

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But Ouma only says, "That which shall be shall be!
We mustn't be thinking to alter the Lord so easily!"

She neither prays for war, nor yet for peace she prays:
"Only let us be ready, children!" is all she says.

"To them that are ready in heart, nothing can come amiss!
Only those that suffer come to the Gates of Bliss!"

I look at her agèd face, her eyeballs bleared and worn,
And think that never I could bear what she has borne!

Trek after trek in the open, to find a home afar,
One of her sons killed hunting, another shot in the war,

And only Piet left now, whom she nursed by the Kaffir kraal,
Here, where they stopped at the river, where was no farm at all!

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I see her knitting's fallen over her knees
again;
She's thinking of Piet, that's gone to the meet-
ing at Landdrost Ven.

Sundown

"Come Bel-Lou! Come Bel-Lou!"
I hear little Jaapie singing.
Through the rocks
Of the lower plain
The bleating flocks
He leads again,
Ewes and milch-cows bringing!

Over the veld, the grassy veld,
Where the Kaffir boys are minding,
I've heard that bell
As sunset nears,
Tell—Tell—
For twenty years,
The herds are homeward winding.

"Come! come! hie you home!"
I hear little Jaapie calling . . .

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And the old man leans
His forage-load
Of winter beans,
And takes his goad,
To fill the cribs for stalling.

"Hie Bel-Lou! hie Bel-Lou!"
The hurrying bells go fleeter . . .
Milking time,
Since man was born,
Has heard that chime,
At eve, and morn;
Ah God! could life be sweeter?

Kraaling done, my little son,
Tired of all day roaming,
Clamours first
For milk and bread,
Slakes his thirst,
And climbs to bed:
And I rise up in the gloaming.

Under the hills, the darkening hills,
The river-drift is gleaming.
The roads are wet,
And one white star,
Where the sun has set,
Shines out afar,
A watch-fire to my seeming!

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Say we grace, but set a place
With coffee made for seven!
Nonnie knows
We wait the men,
That Piet and Koos
Bring Landdrost Ven
Upon his way this even!

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The Oath

'Tis done! the thing I never thought to do!
'Tis Koos I made to take his country's oath—
Last night I yielded him—for evermore!

THE evening meal was done: the lamp was trimmed:
Then in his horny hands the Landdrost took
The Holy Book, out of its sober cloth,
And laid it open in the sight of all,
And read.
Beautiful was the old man's voice,
And hushed the room, as, turning page by page,
He traced the wanderings of the Patriarchs:
And told how Isaac's herdsmen made them wells
Upon the parching plain, not once, nor twice,
And strove with men of Gerar, yielding place
Again and yet again, digging anew
And still removing; till Abimelech
The king beheld them, yea, and honoured them;

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And made a solemn oath beside the well
For ever; and the well was called by them
The Well of Covenant. Then there was peace;
And Isaac, and his sons and daughters served
The Lord and prospered, they and all their flocks!

Beautiful was the old man's voice that read;
But sorrow was upon the heart of all:
For once again about the pleasant wells
Was bitterness, contention, wrath, and strife!

Against my breast, Lotta, the fretful babe,
Dispread her little hand, and sighed, and slept.
I gazed upon her slumbering, and thought
Within myself, 'twere well I weaned the child!
Who knows what lies before us from this night,
This night of gloom? O God, what is this thing,
This breath of war, that lays a sudden frost
On every home, and chills the beating heart?
The whole world stands in awe to-night! Women
With pallid cheeks listen, and pass to each
The blasting word, the message—war! war! war!

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About the inner walls, enthroned on chairs,
The Kaffir girls, Rhāba, and Lēttea
Sat ranged in silence; and beside them, Jan,
The grizzle-headed chieftain of the kraal,
Jaapie's companion, slave, and comforter!
Jan, with his folded arms upon his knees,
Sat in his blanket, happy as a king,
And listened to the golden words of life
With careless ears, intent on some new plan
To smoke the wild bees from his wattled roof,
And win the honey. Close before the stove
Sat Ouma in her place, her thin grey hands
Folded in thought, her wakeful sightless eyes
Seeing we know not what: rarely she speaks!
Beside her, Piet, in his accustomed chair,
Was leaning, chin on hand, plunged into thought—
And near him, Nonnie, pale, with flashing eyes,
And looks defiant. "Why am I a girl?"
She cried, with scalding tears. And by her, Koos
Stood with a gloomy look, sullen and tall,
A bronzed and well-grown lad, not yet sixteen
No—not sixteen! I've told him many a time,
(Nursing fierce comfort,) 'tis a full ten month
Ere they can claim him on the fighting-roll!
Nay, Nonnie, curb that swift sarcastic lip!

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I know your indignation! Wait, my child,
Till you are mother once—then, be my judge!

Piet—he alone knew all, and blamed me not,
Piet, with the patience of the soul of God!
For days in vague disquietude, my heart
Met his regard, so strange it was, and deep;
Louder than any speaking, "Wife!" it said,
"Our son is taller, manlier to the eye.
Than many an older lad! Is he our own
To keep, in this the land's extremity?
At Welbedacht, among the old brick fields,
The Widow Steyn has given her only son,
Geert of the chestnut hair, exempt by law!
And shall we cower, we of a happier lot,
And shelter 'neath the fringes of our rights?"

And all the evening his unspoken thought
Rang out the passionate changes of my heart,
And mingled with the agèd voice that read . . .
How came it he should read of Deborah?

"Now Deborah, the wife of Lapidoth,
Was judge in Israel. Beneath a palm
She dwelt at Ramah, summoning from the cotes
And sheep-folds them that lingered with the
sheep,
Princes of Ephraim, and Issachar!

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So in the day of fear stood Deborah,
Blessed among the mothers in Israel!
And the people offered themselves willingly,
Yea, willingly they offered of their best—
And God was with them!"

Then, with a beating heart,
Rising in quietness, I laid aside
The babe upon her bed, and went to Koos;
And took the boy, yes, by the wondering hand,
And laid it there upon the holy Book
Before them all. And Piet, the father, rose
Beside his son—(close of a height they stood—)
And tendered him aloud the country's oath:
And gave, in the name of God—the hand of Koos
To serve his land till death!
A deepening flush
Of burning red covered the boy's brown cheek;
And, with a sudden arm about my neck,
He choked in shame a sob of gratitude . . .

(Last night I slept the slumber of a child.)

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By the Rushes

I HOPED it might not be,
  Not yet—not yet:
Nonnie is over young,
  And may forget.

Down by the rushy field
  They met last night;
I saw it in her face,
  So hushed and white.

I felt it in her step
  Beside my bed;
She held me in her arms,
  And laid her head

Trembling against my own,
  And could not speak . . .
'Tis Geert that starts at dawn
  For Denver Creek!

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ALONE

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The Start

THE horses all were standing
In stirrup, bridle, bit,
The men awaiting orders—
Motionless and fit!

Boys with an eager eye,
Men with a bearded cheek,
And here and there a lover
With a heart too full to speak!

They stood around, bareheaded,
Out in the old church square;
And the Predikant repeated
Aloud the solemn prayer.

The children led the singing,
The steady throng replied;
But some of the younger women
Turned away and cried.

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Jaapie stood beside me,
  And held my hand in his,
When Piet bent down above me,
  And took his last long kiss.

My lips were dry; but my heart
  I gave him right away,
And the look in his eyes was the look
  On the morn of our wedding day!

Koos among his comrades
  Threw us a joyous word;
And Nonnie marched beside them
  Down to the Yellow Ford.

I heard the children shouting,
  "They mount, they ride away!"
And the little band had vanished
  Into the morning grey!

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WHAT was it I heard to-night, in the milk-house by the barn?
Nonnie singing softly, plunging the wooden churn.

The door was half ajar—I listened—I stood still—
And the words ring on in my ears, with and against my will!

Nonnie's Song

My Secret Heart, you're far to-night
Upon the road!
Nobody recked of us at dawn,
As down we strode,

Out of the square where the women wept,
And the men did pray;
And our two hearts in heaven were beating
All the way!

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I walked beside you to the drift;
And those that care
Could see my cheeks, and read my heart
By daylight there!

Mother has never spoken a word,
And none, I ween,
Will dare to ask me what the thing
They saw might mean!

Last eve it was, before the call
To horse at morn,
Out in the maize-fields, where the furrows
Stand with corn.

By no man's choice it was we met,
As great things be,
Beyond the water reeds that hid
Your path from me.

I saw you standing sudden there:
I said no word;
But in my breast my fluttering heart
Beat like a bird.

You took me in your arms so still,
You made me stay;
You kissed my mouth, you kissed my spirit
Free that day!

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So long it seems my heart had been
A captive thing,
But with a touch you set it free,
And gave it wing!

'Twill run beside you all the day,
And choose your bed,
And make a pillow of the rocks
To rest your head!

I'll sing you in the lonely night
The songs of joy,
And wash the dust from out your hair,
My bonny boy!

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Denny Ardagh

"PUT me over the border-land,
I'm safe for none!" said he;
"Put me over the border-land,
Where the Basutos be!"

Denny Ardagh is Irish-born,
An Irish lad is he,
That took his learning in Dublin town,
Fair Dublin by the sea!

Great he was at the Latin tongue,
And greater still at Greek;
A cleverer lad in any land
Were surely hard to seek!

But laws, and learning too, one day,
For him were dry and drear;
He left his sorrow-hearted Isle,
And came and wandered here,

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To find, he said, a human hearth,
  A quiet roof and home,
Where all the grief of all the age
  Was little like to come.

O, Denny was a gentle lad,
  With a strange and gallant air;
And the light of all the olden kings
  Waved in his sunny hair.

'Tis thirteen years ago he came,
  In the spring of the locust-swarm,
And gave a schooling to the boys,
  Yon, at the widow's farm.

And round the stove, o' winter nights,
  Many's the tale he told,
Of Trojans fighting round the ships,
  And Jason's fleece of gold.

And then with other voice he read
  That wondrous trial-scene,
That doomed the gladdest, calmest death
  That sure has ever been!

But Denny's gone these many days
  Down by the open kloof,
And lived with conies in the rocks,
  Without a bed or roof.

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I saw him 'neath a camel-thorn,
  When dusk was creeping down,
Listening always to the South,
  As for a distant sound.

A plover flapped about the stones
  With a solitary wail:
He rose; and when he turned, his face
  Was very thin and pale.

He took his cloak, he took my hand,
  And said his last good-bye:
He could not meet his brothers there,
  He would not fight or fly.

"I cannot shed my mother's blood,
  Though she be found in sin;
I cannot turn against the hearth,
  The host that took me in.

"Put me over the border-land,
  This is no place for me!
I love you both, and for you both
  'Twere good to die!" said he.

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Children's Flowers

YELLOW tulip, bitter-milk,
  Sweet verbena, spurge,
All within one little lap
  Innocently merge.

Gathered from the grassy veld
  Under the same sky,
Born alike to flower and fruit,
  Cast their seed, and die;

Cherished by a childish joy
  In a childish hand,
Chosen from the reedy place,
  Chosen from the sand,

Children, what is this you bring,
  Careless from your play?
Every weed has got a tongue,
  Ah, since yesterday!

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December 12, 1900

A NOISE of terrible things in the South,
And terrible things in the West;
But here the open corn-fields lie
In the blaze of noonday rest,

As if the fatal hour had struck
Unnoticed, when two lands,
Sworn in the Brotherhood of race,
Arose and joined their hands.

Yet more than name and race must be
The things for which men die—
A common life, a common faith,
And the passion of liberty!

Under the pale seringa bush
I think I see him still,
My grandsire smoking in the shade—
He knew the people well!

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A man of ancient memories,
  A man of courtly glance,
Born of a noble family
  And lineage of France.

"Closer than any bond of blood
  A common suffering binds,"
He said; "and nationality
  Is not of name, but minds!"

We played as children with his watch,
  And sat upon his knee,
And filched the silver box of snuff
  He kept so secretly;
"O little maid," he said, "that box
  Has had a history!"

"It left the country with my sires
  A hundred years ago,
To find a country of the heart,
  Where truth and freedom grow!

"An awful deed is that which slays
  A man in angry strife;
But a bloodier thing is a nation's deed
  That slays a people's life!

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"Punishing men for gratitude
  To that which made them men,
For faithfulness to God, and sire,
  To wood and mountain glen!"

Under the pale seringa bush
  He sat: I see him now,
The centre of my childhood's home,
  Full forty years ago.

He knew the name of everything—
  Of star, and bird, and tree;
And told the tales of daring men
  That sailed the Frozen Sea.

He was the youngest of us all,
  I've heard my mother say;
The freëst, gladdest laugh was his,—
  And yet—he could not pray!

We asked him how the rainbow came,
  Who made the sand-storm blow?
"Go ask your mother, child!" he said;
  "I find—I do not know."

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And yet we loved to run with him,
  And ramble at his side:
It was an empty world for us,
  The bitter day he died!

Under the old seringa bush
  He takes his quiet rest;
Nor hears the sound of the rolling guns
  Over his grave in the West.

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After Sanna's Post

MARCH 31.

FACES lying white,
  Dead so soon—
Fingers stiff and cold
  Under the pale moon,

Dabbled with dust and gore,
  Stript, torn in twain . . .
Where is the Motherland
  That bore these slain?

Far over seas,
  Undreaming yet
The deed that she has done,
  And never shall forget,

When her childless eyes
  See what God has seen,
And know this bitter thing
  Need not have been!

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THE HARVEST

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The Return

April 1900.

O SWEET Return! O looked-for hour!
The day is closing like a flower.
Across the veld he comes, he comes,
True as the evening pigeon homes!

At dawn a native runner came;
His foot was torn, his ankle lame;
But his shining teeth were full of joy,
I could have wept to greet the boy!

"Soon as the sun shall leave the sky,
That hour the master will be nigh;
The Baas returns, a three-week space,
To bless his children with his face,
And set the oxen to the wain,
And reap the fields with his hands again!"

Like one reprieved an hour from death,
I draw sweet ecstasy of breath;
And stand, as one by sorrow shriven,
Within the very gates of heaven!

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That Night was Joy

THAT night was joy in all the country-side,
And many children climbed their father's knee:
It seemed to them they left but yesterday;
'Tis women only know what time can be!

We sat again beside the open door,
And watched the wide-horned oxen wading deep,
Slow-drinking with the slender heaving flank,
Under the great Vaal willows on the steep.

A flight of cranes went out into the west:
The silk-haired goats came running to the fold
Across the thorny pasture, Jaapie's care!
Not one was wanting when the tale was told.

That night was joy again about the board;
The children supped beside their father's knee.
But Koos I miss! the boy is boy no more—
It is a man that has come back to me!

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The Reaping

GEERT is come to Welbedacht!
He hailed us ere the morn;
And worked with Nonnie all the day
Among the standing corn.

The summer dark had scarcely paled
Before the rising sun;
The boys were in the millet fields,
The reaping had begun.

Two hundred morgens stood in oat,
Three hundred more in maize;
And ere they put a sickle in
I heard their song of praise.

Piet was foremost with the scythe;
The women stooped to bind;
And many a swarthy mother bore
Her baby tied behind.

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Jan with solemn gesture led
  The steaming waggon-train,
The medicine-woman at his side,
  Chanting charms for rain.

I like it not: but Piet forbears:
  "Let be: she means it well!
Did Christ begrudge the childish art
  That sought to help and heal?"

With blackened ash of a heifer's foot
  She strewed the living air;
And turned her into her painted hut,
  To make her potions there.

The girls are grinding at the quern,
  With voices glad and free . . .
The master is among his men,
  As he was wont to be!

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At the Garden Rail

'TIS strange that absence often does
What presence cannot do!
Since Piet is back, I mark in him
Old things I never knew.

I went to meet him yester eve;
The honey sky was pale,
The scented parsley filled the air
Beyond the garden rail.

The men were braying cattle-hides
All day within the kraal;
The maidens stripping mealie-cobs
In rows beneath the wall.

Piet was dipping mountain stock
Upon the higher slope:
'Tis three days since he started forth
With casting-net and rope.

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He holds it good: though Ouma says
  'No pagan wash can keep
The scab away, if 'tis His will
  To doom a flock of sheep!'

She sighs, and chides him like a child,
  Lifting her agèd hand;
But if the world is good enough,
  Why till and plough the land?

I looked abroad upon the fields—
  The father lingers late!
When lo, I saw him in the dusk,
  Staggering to the gate,

A new-born calf upon his back—
  He carried it alone;
The mother followed, licking it,
  With tender, anxious moan:
What was there in the sight to make
  My foolish tears to run?

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Harvest Home

Chorale

COME ye! all people, come!
  And lift your hands and voices!
Lo, in your harvest-home
  The earth herself rejoices:
Her yearly task is done,
  Her burden yielded o'er,
The golden grain lies heaped
  Upon the threshing-floor!

Great Father! who in love
  And glory dost array Thee,
The sun and moon above,
  The host of heaven obey Thee!
And on Thy bounteous world
  The wandering child of man
Uplifts his grateful heart,
  Since ages first began!

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From Thee the stirring seed
  Drinks in the tempest-shower:
Thy mighty Hand doth feed
  The thorny desert flower;
The famished lions roar,
  And leave their forest ways,
Seeking their food from Thee,
  Unknowing whom they praise!

But we, Thy children, know
  The Source of all our living;
And, foolish, oft forego
  The promise of Thy giving.
We gather tares for sheaves,
  And choke the rising ears,
And, toiling still in age,
  Must praise Thee through our tears!

No sacrifices dim,
  No offerings of treasure,
Can we devise for Him
  Who giveth without measure.
Only the free-born heart
  Its free-born gift can be!
And this we tender, Lord,
  Father of Life, to Thee!

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Then sing aloud, O earth,
  And sing, O man, the story
Of Him who stooped to birth,
  And made thy crown and glory!
Lord of the Harvest, lo,
  He standeth evermore,
To lead the Harvest-Home
  On Jordan's farther shore!

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The Word of Piet

On the Morning of the Twentieth Day

WIFE! the gathering in is done,
Full is the threshing-floor;
The country calls with the rising sun,
You will not ask me more?
O, Love is a Child in the days of peace,
But a Man in the days of war!

Men of old rejoiced to fight,
As we shall fight to-day!
Not for lust, and thirst for might,
Not for fame, or pay,
But just for the land and the children's right,
With God to lead the way!

Nothing was asked or promisèd
But the oath of hand and eye,

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And a heart that counts itself well paid
  In a patriot's grave to lie;
For they that join our solemn tread
  March with eternity!

When did hearts so careless beat?
  When was grief so far?
Lovers' meetings are not more sweet
  Than warriors' partings are!
For Love is a Child in the days of peace,
  But a Man in the days of war!

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WAR

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MAY 1900.

NOON! and the sound of guns—
The first our ears had heard!
My heart went still, and cowered
A moment—as a bird
Sits low upon her nest,
Where a deadly snake has stirred!

Jaapie stood at the door:
"O mother, do you hear?"
The glow was on his cheek,
The wind was in his hair:
"They fight to save the country!
O mother, that I were there!"

The long death-rattle deepened;
It rolled about the hill.
Jaapie stood beside me,
And Nonnie, proud and still . . .
My heart beat high again,
With a wondrous joy and thrill!

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A THOUSAND sheep,
Captured, gone—
They bleated past
In the blazing sun . . .
But the cattle are safe
On the Morgen-zon!

I was for fetching them
Down to the plain,
But Jan declares
There still is rain;
And things in sight
Are easy gain!

I scorn to be saved
What others bear!
Bring me loss,
And bring me care!
My country's woe
I too will share!

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At Welbedacht

"THE stallions I must have, good wife!
the red one and the brown.
'Twill be to your advantage, too, to send them
saddled down
Into the camp to-night; if not, be sure I come
at morn!"

She stood at the open door, alone, in her
widow's dress;
She saw them ride away—she knew her lone-
liness,
And turned and wrung her hands. "My God—
spare me this!"

"The red and the brown, he said? Nay, take
the rest o' the stall!
Foals my husband bred, and prized the most
of all,
To bear strange men, and ride to the enemy's
bugle call!

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"Where is Geert this hour? What would the laddie say
To see them led at dawn by the trooper's hand away,
To head the charge upon our men, in a distant fray?"

She sat till the sun went down; and waited for the night:
She looked to the distant camp, where the fires flickered bright;
Then silently she rose, and fetched a stable light.

The children slumbered both: she bent above the bed;
She took the leathern case from under the mattress head,
And slowly turned her steps behind the cattle-shed.

The creatures heard her foot, and whinnied to see her stand:
She loosed the halters, and gave the open fondling hand . . .
Nay, finer foals were never foaled in any land!

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She led to the open manger; she tethered the lantern fast,
And mixed the ready mash. "Though it should be our last,"
She cried, "we will have to-night our joy of this repast!"

Their lips and nostrils quivered to feel the wholesome corn;
She combed their massy manes with a comb of yellow horn:
"We must be ready, ready to meet the coming morn."

She looked abroad from the threshold: the dawn was very near!
The manger-meal was done: why did she linger there?
She turned her into the stable, steady, without a fear . . .

Four pistol-shots rang out in the silence of the night—
The cow-boy started forth from his hut in sudden fright,
And met a reeling woman bearing a stable-light.

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* * * * *

Two troopers came at dawn, with a sergeant
at their head.
"Yield us the stallions, woman! the brown
one and the red!"
She gazed as one that wanders: "Take them,"
was all she said.

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GOD of Peace! God of War!
To Thee belong
The lightning flash, the linnet's song,
And the rattling cannon's roar!
Half the world prepares Thee joys,
But wrath, and death, and human cries
Thy sorrows are!

God of Darkness! God of Light!
On Thy Breast,
Tossed in changing storm and rest,
We strain our passionate sight,
Clasping things we cannot see,
Making a Temple unto Thee
Out of the night!

Digitized by Google

Geert

THEY brought him in at midnight,
Across the saddle-bow—
Geert of the ripe and chestnut hair,
Geert of the sunny brow!

She took a covered pillow,
And sheets without a fold;
She laid him on his boyish bed—
That bed for ever cold!

The younger children slumbered,
The little lamp was lit,
And seven they were about the corpse,
And silent looked on it.

Six men they stood around it,
The widow at the head;
And proud her pale and awful face
That gazed upon the Dead!

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Upon his brow the death-damp,
  But on his lips a smile,
As if he bore not in his breast
  The cruel shot the while!

Killed in a gallant venture,
  Killed at the cornet's side,
The youngest of the company
  That in the South did ride!

A man sobbed in the darkness,
  But the grizzled sergeant said,
"The Lord hath given and taken away!
  Write—Blessed are the Dead!"

Two men went out in silence,
  With shovel, pick, and spade,
And by a lonely koppie-bush
  A soldier's bed they made.

In sight of home they laid him:
  And when the morning sun
Looked down upon the desert-plain,
  Six horsemen rode alone.

Digitized by Google

Nonnie's Lament

O MOTHER, not to have known it!
O mother, not to be there!
Let me, O let me see him,
And then my heart will bear!

My bosom would have warmed him!
My touch the wound could seal;
I would have staunched it with my love:
My very breath could heal!

I watch above the maize-fields,
The plovers in the air,
For ever, ever crying,
"O love, hadst thou been there!"

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The Widow's Lament

I'VE given the pulse o' my heart,
  And its happy tread!
I've banished smiles, and I ask
  No tears instead!

I've shut the half-filled barn,
  And closed the door,
The latch has lost its use
  For evermore!

The linen lies on the grass,
  Forlorn and grey;
The blue has left the sky,
  The sun the day;

For the voice that woke the song
  Of all my world,
Fresher than mountain stream
  That ever purled,

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Eyes that shone with the light
  Of heaven above,
Hands that were strong and soft
  In the ways of love,

Are silent under the rocks
  Of the parching plain,
By the trodden river reeds
  Where the guns have lain!

Only another gift,
  And another life,
To feed the deathless flame
  Of a holy strife!

Kings from their treasuries
  May yield their best,
But a woman will strip the glory
  Of all her nest . . .

When the widow's heart is high
  With her country's fate,
The gift of a broken hearth
  Is not too great!

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News from Bloemfontein

May 1900.

MY heart is sick with pity to-night,
I could bow my head and cry,
Not for the boy that sleeps on the veld,
And smiled to die!

Not for the widow that stood at morn
Hooded by yonder stone,
Honoured of all that passed her by
For her dead son!

Not for her with her steady look,
And her folded arms, that say,
I sent him forth, and I would not keep
Him back to-day!

'Tis for the women over the seas,
Whose men and sons are here,
Doomed to toil at a darkened cause
With hands too dear!

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Theirs are not these waving fields,
  Not theirs the earth they tread;
They have no precious homes to guard,
    No sacred Dead!

They die like sheep upon the hills;
  By fever and thirst they fall
In an alien land, marching to death
    At a trumpet's call!

No voice from heaven confirms the word,
  No answering cry within
Exultant echoes, "Live or die,
    Ye can but win!"

For us and ours that summons clear,
  Quickening hand and heart;
And never a doubt in the frailest soul
    Of the better part!

But oh, unnerved by the splendid need,
  Unbraced by the inner joy,
The far-off tearless mother mourns
    Her fallen boy!

Piet is far, and Geert is gone;
  And yet, and yet, ah me!
There's many that envy my grief to-night
    Across the sea!

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Homeless

JULY 1900.

A SOUND of galloping last night—
There's trouble on the line;
And on the veld a smoking farm,
The farm of Widow Steyn!

She took her children by the hand,
She watched her home aflame;
She rose, and fled into the hills,
Cursing with bitter blame!

She had no waggon for her flight,
She left no word behind . . .
The Kaffirs say she spoke with none—
Lord Jesus, save her mind!

The boys stood round like huddled sheep,
Angry and sullen eyed;
But two that know the open Bush
Have gone to be her guide.

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Three hundred bags of mealie grain
  Lay scattered on the ground;
A vulture flapped about the yard,
  And not another sound!

The slaughtered pigs and feathered fowls
  Lay rotting in the sun . . .
O God, what was the sin for which
  This wilful waste was done?

The roof stands empty to the sky,
  A home without a name;
And tongueless doors and windows cry
  The blackened deed of shame!

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Night

O NIGHT, thou art my mother!
O Night, within thine arms
I bend my head, and hide me
From all the day's alarms.

Wonderful are thy whispers,
Thy silence, and thy dark!
The pale acacia slumbers,
The moth flits round the bark!

The rustling cornfields murmur
And mingle in their sleep;
And overhead the planets
Ascend their courses steep!

The scent of the silver poplar
Breathes in the stilly air;
It trembles without motion,
And sighs, and whispers there!

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O Night of rest and healing,
  My soul leans out to you,
And bares her thirsty bosom
  To drink your dropping dew.

Summon your holy shadows
  About my aching head,
And in the lap of darkness
  Make me a cradle-bed!

Around my quiet pillow
  Shall come all gentle things,
And angels walk the watches
  With furled and flashing wings.

Here would I meet my lost ones,
  And with their spirits pray;
And catch the sound of voices
  I cannot hear by day.

O Night, thou art my mother!
  If Death be like to thee,
I care not in what hour
  She bend and cover me!

Digitized by Google

Face to Face

August 1900.

'TWAS yester fortnight, there he lay, under the trellised vine,
The wounded blue-eyed British scout, a captain of the line.

They halted here in the heat of noon, after a fearsome ride,
Bearing despatches to the front, a Kaffir for their guide.

Four they were with the Kaffir boy, dusty, grim, and grey,
Men that scarce had saddled-off an hour since break of day!

The horses breathed with broken breath, their reeking flanks were torn
With the pressure of the rowels, and the cruel camel-thorn.

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"Lift me down, my lads," he said, "and let me take my chance;
Get horses of the people here . . . you can send an ambulance

"If Colonel thinks it worth the while . . . I'm hard hit, I fear . . .
Good woman, will you grant me leave to lie a little here?

"And give me drink? . . . Here is my watch . . . you shall be amply paid. . . .
Now, men, to horse! God will, by night you'll be in camp," he said.

"And don't forget—no—never mind" . . . he waved a faint farewell.
The men saluted, said no word, and plunged them down the hill.

But I saw a tear on the furrowed cheek of the foremost man that strode,
And the other turned with a husky cheer, as he cantered down the road.

The Kaffirs stood about the place, gaping open-jawed;
The women at the mealie-block, and the children from the yard.

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Jan and Esau carried him in, and Nonnie went
for milk;
I washed the blood, and bound his wrist with a
handkerchief of silk.

But the deadly bullet was in the groin, and the
fever was running high:
A sob came strangely to my throat—"God!
let him not die!"

So broad he was, and young, and strong; and
barely twenty-three:
And weakly grateful as a child . . . who might
his mother be?

Nonnie watched without a word, reluctant, half
in awe,
And gathered in a dream the clothes that lay
about the floor,
And filled the cup of milk again; and still he
asked for more.

* * * * *

'Twas scarce an hour when clattering hoofs
again were round the house,
And bearded faces thronged the stoep, in boot,
and belt, and blouse:
Glad was the greeting, as with friends that meet
for some carouse!

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"Give us a sheep, good wife!" they cried; "and milk, and a barrel of fruit;
We know the farm of Piet de Waal as a farm of high repute:
Eight we are, and a thirsty lot, and still in hot pursuit!"

I knew the band, a trusty set, that called three weeks ago;
Ter Winckel was the commandant, the man with the single brow;
(The other side was shorn away long since by a Kaffir blow.)

I brought him into the inner room; he looked upon the bed:
"Good Lord! why, this is the man I shot! and now I must draw the lead!"
And he turned his sleeve with a mighty laugh, and shook his tawny head.

"Christian war is a madman's war: we're angels all, or fools!"
And he laughed again, and called aloud to his adjutant for tools.

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Ter Winckel's hands are lithe and firm, fit for
a woman's pride;
Ter Winckel's knife is the surest cut in all the
country side.

"So, my son, you've had ill luck! D'ye care to
trust to me?
But we don't do much with chloroform in
this wild land," said he.
And the Briton gave his grip, and smiled upon
his enemy.

It took an hour; but the thing was found that
had its deadly play,
And the bloodless face and nerveless hand lay
still and white as clay.
"He's got some grit: were they all like that,
we shouldn't be here to-day!"
Ter Winckel growled, as he wiped his hands,
and put his tools away.

The sheep was roasting in the yard. "Now,
comrades, when you've done,
We'll capture those despatches yet, before
the setting sun!

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"The river's high: they've gone, I guess,
a round to find the ford:
Hoist your clothes to the pommel, lads;
strip and swim's the word!"

Another hour—the yard was bare; and on the
farther side
Of the brimming flood, across the veldt, we
saw eight horsemen ride.

* * * * *

He slept a little near the dawn: I watched his
quiet breath:
So pale he was, it almost seemed he slept the
sleep of death.

A week—and we could lay him out, under the
trellis-shade,
Pillowed upon the couch of laurel-wood that
Piet had made.

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And strange it was, but Ouma once I found
there, sitting long;
She liked, it seemed, to speak and hear again
the English tongue,
Taking her back to happier days before the
world went wrong.

What their talk I cannot tell, before I stood
beside:
"I know that there was pain," she said: "I
know that there was pride;
But patience should have been with you, upon
the stronger side."

He turned on her with a flashing glance his
northern eye of blue:
"Mother, I touch no Politics, however false or
true:
A soldier only knows and does as his country
bids him do.

"War, I find, need nurse no hate!" he said it
with gentle mirth:
"I honour your folk about as much as any folk
on earth" . . .
Over her pallid features went a sudden flush
of wrath.

Digitized by Google

"But the flaming farms are marked in heaven
as altars overthrown!"
And he replied, "You should not tear the rails,
as you have done!"
"We built them! May we not destroy the
things that are our own?

"'Tis I am old, and you are young; but you
will know one day
That nations are like men, and boys, in wrath
and in their play;
And like a man they make a debt, and like a
man must pay.

"And some can farther see than others what
are the things to know,
What the things to cherish fast, and what the
things to go:
And the simplest life is the wisest life, and the
happiest, I trow.

"My people learnt in other days the lesson
now you learn:
Ours was the empire of the seas, the wealth
for which you burn:
We lost them; but the race has gained what
still you mock and spurn.

Digitized by Google

"What is might but a brandished sword, a flag
of yesterday?
Where is the throne Napoleon heaped together
for his play?
The thoughts of little lands live on, and
govern us to-day!

"Conquering is a thing of the mind, no act of
fame, or gold;
And that which once has conquered life will
never lose its hold,
Although it change its name, and place, and
treaties damn it, 'Sold!'

"When the turbulent human race, the childish
sons of men,
Have fought their little passions out, and
naked stand again,
We'll know the conquerors and the slaves; but
not till then, till then!

"We're learning many a thing to-day under an
iron rod:
It is not you that set the task, but the mighty
hand of God;
And He has led us many years on a sharp and
prickly road.

Digitized by Google

"He knows the heart of those He tries, and
what He needs them for;
The little folk grows less and less, and dwindles
in the war,
But there's another gathering folk upon a
farther shore . . ."

She ceased; her eyes were far away; the sun
was sinking low;
Her face was lit with holy joy: I rarely knew
it so:
But some in darkness see what we in daylight
never know!

* * * * *

Lullaby

SABBATH MORNING.

SLEEP, Baby, sleep!
Earth remembers God to-day.
Hands that fought but yesterday
Fold themselves awhile and pray—
Sleep, Baby, sleep!

Digitized by Google

Hush, from every hill
O'er the weary world again,
Over ocean, river, plain,
O'er the living, o'er the slain,
Calls the Sabbath bell!

Sleep, Baby, sleep!
Here awhile within the shade
War disarmed by love is laid,
And a peaceful bed has made—
Sleep, Baby, sleep!

* * * * *

Four days ago, and still he lay out under the trellised vine,
The wounded blue-eyed British scout, a captain of the line.

They came at ten with a stretcher-cart to carry him away:
"Can't you leave me here, my boys, at least another day?

"Thirty miles on a waggon-track, out under the blazing sun . . .
You'll find your pains are for a corpse before your task is done."

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The sergeant fretted round the yard, and
counselled with his men.
"We've been two days upon the road, and
mayn't be near again:
The column leaves for the North at once: my
orders here are plain!"

He looked at the sergeant—looked at me—he
looked at the distant sky:
I saw a sudden and only tear flash in his
fearless eye.
"Hoist me cheerily, then, my lads! My
generous friends, good-bye!"

'Tis four days since they took him back to
where the army lay . . .
And now, they tell, in a new-made grave he
lies since yesterday!

Digitized by Google

Psalm lxxx

SEPTEMBER 1900.

O SHEPHERD Thou of Israel,
That leadest us like sheep—
O Thou that twixt the cherubim
Thy changeless watch dost keep—

Stir up Thy strength, and come again
To help Thy chosen race!
How long wilt Thou be wroth with us,
And turn away Thy face?

Thou feedest us with bread of tears,
Thou givest tears to drink;
Thou mak'st the world to stare around,
They mock at us, and wink.

Is this the vine that Thou didst take,
The grafting of Thy hand,
Among the heathen planting it,
Until it filled the land?

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Thou madest room for it: it grew
  Like boughs of cedar trees:
She stretched her shadows to the hills,
  And filled the pleasant breeze.

Why hast Thou broken down her hedge,
  And laid her branches low?
That all that pass may pluck her grapes,
  And flout her as they go?

The tusky boar out of the wood
  Makes riot at the roots;
And plundering hands in open day
  Lay waste her juicy fruits.

Return, great Husbandman, return,
  And visit then this vine,
The man Thou gav'st so strong a name,
  Who calls himself by Thine.

Turn us again, O Lord of Hosts,
  The glory of Thy face;
And heal the hearts of them that pray,
  Thy tried and olden race!

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THE FLIGHT OF THE CHILDREN

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The Flight of the Children

November 1900.

THEY'RE gone, my pretty Babes! my fairest, latest born,
Twin-flowers they were amid a field of autumn corn!

Too young, too fresh to see the cruel woes of war,
To watch a blazing hearth, and a scattered threshing-floor!

A message came from Piet, urging, send them away
Up to the mountain farm; 'tis but a night and a day—

A single night of thirst, through the sand and the salt-white plain,
And a day's ascent through the yellow-woods and groves again,

Digitized by Google

Where the mimosa bows her crest in the golden sun,
And the summer drone of bees in the glades is never done.

Sister Christian's home will ever a haven be,
Out of the path of the war, and the iron rail, said he.

Three hours it is, and more, since we inspanned the steer,
And I lifted the children up with a heavy heart of fear.

Nonnie is taking charge—with Esau, dull and meek;
She'll rest the bullocks, and come again to us in a week.

She gave the reins to Joel; and Esau at her side
Cracked the long loud lash of the whip of oxen-hide.

The children waved their hands till lost on the dusty plain,
And I turned me back, and sat me down in the porch again.

Digitized by Google

A lizard basks on the stoep in the gasping
midday heat,
As if it knew the fear no more of little feet.

* * * * *

Sundown! Jaapie stands with Jan at the open
pen,
And counts the sheep by tens and hundreds
running in.

He passes the yellow grains of corn from hand
to hand,
And rules the boys with his father's air of
grave command.

O Piet, I miss you sore; my heart is full of
dread;
O for that quiet breast on which to lay my
head!

I dare not leave the farm and the men for an
idle cry,
But a terror is in my heart to-night, I know
not why!

* * * * *

Digitized by Google

'Tis nearly moonrise now: the East is gathering light.
By the distant gleam of the drift, 'tis over-full to-night.

O Nonnie, wait till morn; out-span the lowing team,
Release their tossing horns from the creaking shoulder-beam.

Children, 'tis time for sleep! Nonnie shall make your bed,
And draw the waggon-sail about your dreaming head.

'Tis Nonnie sits beside you, and soothes your weary sigh,
And shields you from the fear of the lonely jackal-cry.

And overhead the stars shall mount their solemn guard,
And round your camp all night my love keep watch and ward!

* * * * *

Digitized by Google

NEXT DAY.

At dawn my soul went out again,
  With bare unsandalled feet,
As a ewe will track her ravished lamb,
  And follow in its bleat.

I roused the boys beneath the wheels,
  Where at the drift they lay,
And urged the lazy oxen in,
  At the faintest breath of day.

The stars were veiled with the milk of morn
  Far in the blue o'erhead,
And the morn was lying on her back
  Over a streak of red.

The East was all aglow with light—
  The day would soon be here;
The driver cracked his idle whip,
  And gave a lusty cheer.

The flood was past! the leather thongs
  Groaned with the starting strain;
And the dust of forty hooves went up
  Over the silent plain!

Digitized by Google

AFTERNOON.

Across the open fields
  I lift my eyes:
In glimmering purple all
  The mountain lies.

Far as the ear can hear,
  No living thing;
Only the water dropping
  At the spring.

The children, by this hour,
  Are far away;
I press my hands together
  And try to pray.

O little voices, quick
  To comfort me!
O little forms, that leaned
  Against my knee!

I envy the arms that take
  You in to-night—
I envy the waiting bed,
  So soft and white.

Digitized by Google

A woman's form was made
  To cradle a child,
And the lap of loneliness
  Will drive me wild!

Behind your groaning wheels
  I walked all day—
My body sat at work,
  But I—was away!

You prattled with the boy,
  And teased until
Nonnie withdrew her gaze
  From the distant hill,

Her fair young eyes, so worn,
  And her lips so pale,
With the kiss of the newly dead,
  And a dead love-tale!

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CAPTIVITY

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Fire—Famine—Sword

THREE DAYS LATER.

A SOUND of galloping at night!
I lay till morn in fear,
And went about to make the bread
With heavy steps and drear:
Why is the day so long? I cried:
O, when will night be here?

Nonnie should be returning soon,
A night and a day at most!
I set the dough upon the hearth,
I looked, and lo, a host
Of armèd men were in the yard . . .
I knew that all was lost.

I brought them milk, but the major turned,
And waived it with a sign;
"I'm sorry—you must leave this place!
It stands too near the line!
I'll give you half an hour," he said;
"They'll help—these men o' mine!"

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"O wait three days," I cried, "good sir!
  Three days, but only three!
I have a daughter on her way;
  Think what with her might be
To come upon a ruined home,
  And no one there to see!"

"Are you the woman nursed last month
  The captain?" "Such am I!"
He struck his boot, and bit his lip,
  And wrath was in his eye.
"Had I but known it! Curse it all!"
  He muttered bitterly.

Nonnie! Nonnie! was all my thought,
  But Jaapie stood beside:
"Don't be afraid! To Nonnie, mother,
  Nothing will e'er betide!
She's bolder than a bigger boy
  That sits a horse astride!"

They heaped the van. "Nay, don't look back!"
  The kindly major said;
But look I must—and saw the flames
  Through floor and stable spread,
Where the waggon and the children's cart
  Lay splintered in the shed.

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The waggon 'twas that Piet had built
  Through many a winter day;
No hand had touched it but his own—
  Axle, tyre, and stay;
But the foulest flames that hour were those
  That spoilt the children's play!

"Rhaba! Lettea! they must come!
  They cannot stay behind!
These girls were twenty years with us,
  And one is going blind!
They'll never go back to the kraals again:
  They're of a different kind!"

"We have no room for blacks!" they said;
  And pushed their hands away
That clung upon the waggon sail,
  Imploring us to stay:
They wept, and walked beside the men
  A mile upon the way!

Jaapie's face was fierce and still;
  He held me by the hand;
The bleating of two thousand sheep
  Went with us through the sand;
And all along the darkened sky
  A smoke lay o'er the land.

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To the Camps

THEY marched us in to Mandelvlei; they marched us in on foot:
The waggons both were left behind, fast sticking in a spruit.

They marched us in, a weary band, young women and old men,
A babe in arms, an idiot youth, and children—nine or ten.

The darks—they scoffed us to our face, the darks that hate the white . . .
O Jesus, was it thus with Thee, that world-remembered night?

I saw Thee turn about, and meet their shameless words alone,
And say, "'Tis I! Let go these simple sheep! What have they done?"

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I felt Thee marching with us all, upon that bitter way;
I never knew Thy step so near as on this stricken day!

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In the Square

WHO is it there, out under the tree,
Watching our group so earnestly?

Jaapie trembles: he sees them stand—
'Tis Chris and the children at either hand.

'Tis market day; she's left the height . . .
But little thought to meet this sight!

She tries to smile, but weeps instead;
And lifts the bonnet from each fair head.

Nay, Chris! they must not know 'tis I,
Or they would clamber here and cry!

O hear the soundless words I say—
For God's sake turn their eyes away.

Keep them far, for their mother's arm
This hour could bring but deadly harm!

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Sweet babes! you look at the limping show,
Your eyes a-wander, your cheeks a-glow! . . .

O let us hurry across the place,
We stumble on at a sickening pace!

My kappie is low: they will not see—
And the boy is the other side of me!

Jaapie, child! I feel your hand . . .
Who gave you this heart to understand?

Digitized by Google

By Rail

MAKE way in the crowded trucks—a babe
has died!
Born but an hour since—an hour it cried—
All that is left of a mother's secret pride!

Scrape in the burning sand a shallow grave:
The hours creep on, and lives are hard to save;
Carry us out of the parching heat, we crave!

The mother's head lay gasping on my knee . . .
At set of sun, beneath a wild-thorn tree
Another grave was covered silently!

Digitized by Google

In Camp

SEVEN nights, and lo, before us lies the camp!

Four days of trek beyond the great white
marsh,
Encrusted round with reeds and brittle thorn;
Beyond the blackened waters, where at night
No bull-frog croaks, under the clouded moon,
Where all is silent, silent as with death!
Over the fiery plain, and barren rocks—
By Kaffir kraals, watching us as we went,
To seize upon the bullocks, lowing loud,
Fallen upon the track, and stung with flies,
Famished for want of drink . . .
Three days by rail
In cattle trucks, with scarcely food for all,
And only curdled mare's milk for the babes—
O God, to think a single human word,
A written line, had power to alter this!

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Seven weary nights; and now, with blistered skin
And smarting thoughts, most pitiable, we stand—
Here in the crowded tents within the pale.
At noon I raised my eyes upon the hills—
The red, the far-off glowing hills, that look
Down from their ancient loneliness; and trace
The mining trails and huts, thin spreading scars
Of the land's disease, livid as leprosy!
There the great Earth lies wounded and dismayed,
Suffering the iron tool's impiety;
Her marrow, pierced by the fretful hand of man,
Yielding unwillingly the gold herself
Had little prized; and from her tampered veins
Nourishing shiftless crows of many lands,
And spreading fever through the whole wide world!

Out of the lavish beauty of the earth
The fiend must take his toll! Innocent flowers
Raise henbane, colic lilies, and wan spurge
Amid their ranks. The purple dusk-eyed moths
Are aped by venomous flies, so like themselves
'Tis hard to tell them. 'Mong the playful beasts
Moves the dull serpent, and the cruel cat

Digitized by Google

With treacherous footstep. So, of naked
stones,
One must bring poison, greed, and enmity—
Even the rarest! Were the plough to turn
Gold in the furrow, flint would be devil's coin!

O Demon of Possession! lo, we lie
Before the fearful furnace of thy might,—
Women and children of captivity,
Dying to pay the pagan price of gold!

Digitized by Google

A Cry

JANUARY 1901.

YE that sit afar, and the clouds of the war-storm heap,
Bidding from council-chambers the levin-fire leap,
Not one of you, standing here, but would turn aside and weep!

To see the fading children, the flowers of the plain,—
The bruised and blighted blossoms that never will blow again,—
Under the breath of the war-blast, stricken, scorched, and slain!

Yon woman going alone with her washing out of sight,
Nor looking to the left, nor looking to the right,
Buried the last of four, her youngest, yesternight.

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Wrapped in a kartel-blanket,—ah, so pitiful,
With shadow-darkened eyes, and wasted hands,
so still,—
We laid it among the rest, out yonder on the
hill.

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Lamentations in Two Voices

MINE eyes gush out with water for the suffering of my people . . .

The Lord is still our portion, therefore we hope in Him!

Lord! Thou hast seen our wrong! judge Thou, judge Thou our cause . . .

Out of Thy mouth proceedeth evil and good for men!

Thou makest us a by-word, a refuse of the earth . . .

How shall a man complain, man that is full of sin?

Our skin is black as an oven, because of the terrible heat . . .

His mercies are new every morning! Great is His faithfulness!

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We drink our water for money, and our wood is sold to us . . .

Let us search out our ways, and turn again to Him!

The joy of our heart is ceased, our dance is turned to mourning . . .

Let us lift up our hearts to God who rules in heaven!

But Thou hast rejected us, and art very wroth with us,
Covering Thyself with a cloud that our prayer should not pass through!

Thou dost not willingly grieve or afflict the children of men,
To crush beneath Thy feet the poor ones of the earth!

Turn Thou unto us, O Lord, and we shall be turned!

Digitized by Google

February 1901

THEY say, the Queen has died—
The agèd Queen!
The mourning will be wide;
Whatever else betide,
The world declares no greater Queen has been!

Born in a wondrous day,
A day of change,
Her girlhood led the way,
And her womanhood took sway
In manners, faith, and rule of widest range.

We know she wept to hear
Things that have been!
No people, far or near,
But holds her memory dear
Of God, who made her Woman first, then Queen!

Digitized by Google

At the Washing-Pool

MAY 1901.

YOUNG Martha saw her good-man
  Secretly—yesterday!
He joined the women washing
  Down yonder at the vlei.

The war, he tells, is nearing,
  At last, the desperate goal:
The men are pinched, and many
  Are riding mares in foal.

He brought us news of Nonnie;
  Thank God, she's safe by this!
'Tis Piet himself that found her,
  And took her back to Chris.

The night the farm was fired—
  Alas! 'tis widely known—
She dressed her as a stripling,
  And started forth alone,

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With powder in her pocket,
  And a rifle in her hand,
To join de Bok's commando,
  A wild and daring band.

They honoured her: they kept her
  Safe as a maid may be;
And she rode among the foremost
  Of all that company.
But oh, to think, and bear it . . .
  What those young eyes did see!

'Tis Piet himself that found her,
  And took her back to Chris . . .
To-morrow in the gloaming
  He comes to tell me this!

Digitized by Google

At the Fence

A SMOKE of bush-fires on the veld,
  A living lurid line,
That rolled away into the north
  Past the deserted mine . . .

I came, and went, and watched the sand
  Darken the angry west;
And prayed that none might hear my heart,
  Or mark its strange unrest.

I dared not speak, and tell the child;
  And Ouma, if she knew,
Would bid me take her by the arm
  And go to meet him too.

'Twas midnight when I saw him stand;
  The murky moon was low;
Did mortal lovers ever make
  And keep a trysting so?

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His coat was ragged on his back,
  His bandolier was torn:
Had ever eyes so sad a look?
  Was ever face so worn?

His fingers trembled holding mine,
  And twice he tried to speak;
He knelt, and pressed aside the barbs,
  That cut his chin and cheek.

I took his head between my hands;
  I never knew till then
How suffering can make a king
  Of ordinary men!

He kissed me once; but in that kiss
  Sorrow had passed away:
What matter death was in the dawn,
  And darkly broke the day?

"I go," he said; "dear wife, forbear . . .
  And though the worst be nigh,
Be sure that God abides His hour!
  His cause can never die!"

The moon was dark; he loosed my hands;
  He stepped behind a stone;
I listened: when the moon came out
  Again—I was alone.

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New Year's Night

JANUARY 1902.

LIFT up your hearts, ye children!
The world is hushed to-night!
Carry a song about the camp,
And bear you each a light;

For many hearts are weary,
And many cannot pray;
And yet the pillared fire and cloud
Are with us night and day.

Around the tents we gather,
And sing in solemn part:
"O children of captivity,
Lift up, lift up your heart!

"Ye shall not weep for ever,
Your tears are seen on high!
The hour of your redemption
Is drawing very nigh!"

Digitized by Google

Banished

FEBRUARY 1902.

WOUNDED—caught—at Vondelhed,
O God, four weeks ago!
Was there no angel at Thy throne,
His other greater missions done,
To come that night beside my bed,
With folded wings about his head,
And bid me rise and go?

Koos was with him, so they say
That saw him carried down that day—
Down to the ship with a hundred more,
Bound for the far-off Indian shore,
Across the Indian Bay!

I cannot think—I cannot weep.
The sun itself floats on the deep
Like an empty carcass,—dead and wan,—
And God Himself looks on—looks on!

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On the Face of the Deep

IT cannot be as if I had not prayed!
My voice, my tears are gone!
All night the darkness moaned with shapes of fear
About the camp; but list'ning now, I hear
A tender stirring, as of leaves at dawn.

It cannot be as if I had not prayed!
O for a magic love
To touch the wound, and heal the broken bone!
But something mocks, and holds me from my own,
A weight of earth and air I cannot move!

Yet who may track the boundless path of thought,
Its secret course lay bare,
Adding its impulse to the world-life given,
Forcing new channels for the gift from heaven,
Drawing the will of God by hands of pray'r!

Digitized by Google

All night my spirit fled into the dark,
Wrestling with forms unknown,
Hiding her fierce unyielded love away;
But now I stand at heaven's door and pray,
"Use Thou my will, that Thine, O Lord, be done!"

Digitized by Google

Jaapie

UNDER my burning tent-roof a little figure lies,
With withered gasping lips, and darkly watchful eyes,
As I moisten the rags again, and fan away the flies.

"Mother, I never told you," to-day he slow began,
"The night they burnt the farm, I meant to go with Jan,
And hide in the haunted cave by the wood that's under a ban.

"The mouth is just a hollow under a stink-wood tree;
But a man goes down to the chest with one step, easily;
And there you stand in twilight, far as the eye can see!

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"I found the place last summer, and clambered down below,
And felt the damp, dark air blow cool upon my brow,
And saw the skulls and weapons lying, row by row.

"Jan looked in, and trembled to see me playing there,
Where once his ancient fathers fought with the fiends of air,
And those that could not flee, starved in their rocky lair!

"Jan taught me charms for snake-bite—he knew the magic flowers,
The way of the great white ant, her fortresses and towers,
The meer-kat, and the den where the mountain-leopard lours!

"I longed to stay behind, and live that life so free;
But then I thought how Father had said a boy can be
As brave as any burgher: 'Tis Mother you guard,' said he.

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"And Mother, here I wanted to go with the rest to play
Beyond the fence, and build a bastion out of clay;
'But you're too big a lad,' the sentries always say.

"They know I've carried a gun—I've often told them so!
They laugh, and think I'd try to run away, I know . . .
Perhaps it's just as well they did not let me go!

"But you'll tell Nonnie, Mother, when she comes back again,
I kept the stack of cow-mist and fetched the mealie grain,
And wouldn't let you tramp for rations in the rain . . ."

Why does he speak of Nonnie, and not of his Father instead?
What is he murmuring softly, rolling his weary head?

"Where is Father, Jaapie?" I whispered low. He smiled,
And turned to my face a wonderful look for any child.

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"Is he not landed, Jaapie, yet on the Indian shore?"

But Jaapie closed his eyes, wandered, and told no more.

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Under the Wild Moon

March 1902.

UNDER the wild moon
A rough stone stands,
Raised too soon,
Marked by alien hands,
Glimmering white afar
In the dead lambs' fold—

"Jaapie—prisoner of war—
Ten years old!"

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The Dream

Easter Eve, 1902.

FOUR nights I had not slept. I stood beside the barbèd fence,
And watched the sudden gusts of sand among the withered bents.

The cloudy giants of the west upreared their spendid height;
The sky was full of wind, and lit the plain with a purple light.

Three hundred tents in the ruddy glow were stretched like a living dream,
Struck with the lash of the coming hail, and the slanting sunset beam.

I tightened up the ropes and made the flapping door-sail fast,
And laid me down by Ouma's side, and listened to the blast.

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'Twas Easter Eve. Three years ago, the children, Piet, and I
Went with the folk to take the Evening Meal at Mandelvlei.

It was a great Communion Day: the harvesting was o'er,
And thirty bullock waggons filled the old church square, and more!

Three days we were away that year, before the twins were born:
Surely 'twas in another world, that peaceful Easter morn!

And lo, with memory, sleep returned. I was a child again,
Wandering with my grandsire by the donga on the plain.

As many a time we rambled through the glen, and up the spruit,
When he was nearly seventy-two, and I was scarcely eight.

I saw him with his shaven beard, his neck-cloth stiffly set;
And the onyx on his shrunken hand, methinks I see it yet!

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Pointing to where the cactus dropped her blossoms, blushing red;
And where the little sundews grew, and made their fatal bed
Above the springs, that only ran at eve, the Kaffirs said—

Slumbering springs of fœtid breath among the sedges high,
Where never a bird was known to dip, and never a dragon-fly;

But in a hollow bank a swollen water-snake had laid
Her heavy coils, and watched us, moving stealthy in the shade.

A rosy flesh-pink ice-leek hung its root where the waters fell,
And a speckled aloe branched above, and the moon-white asphodel.

The yellow stream ran down the ledge, and dripped in finest rain
Over the slime and moss; and filled a steaming pool again.

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We clambered up the broken gorge of grey and
bearded trees;
And thicker still the grasses grew, and clung
about our knees.

A sickening fear was in my heart: darker the
cliff arose;
And ever steeper grew the sides, and wilder,
and more close.

At the Rock of the Prison-Winds he turned,
with his old assuring smile,
And stooped to raise me: "Courage, child!
the Way is worth the while!"

I stood beside him! Through a cleft in the
shelving walls around
I saw a sunny sloping vale, with dew upon the
ground.

I heard dim voices in the cloud—I knew not
what they said!
But in the mist that shone like tears, moving
with joyous tread—
The dearest of the Company, they came,—my
sacred Dead!

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Jaapie—his little hand in Piet's, uplooking in
his face:
They could not see me where I stood, a stranger
in that place;

But Piet in going raised his hand, and listened.
From his eye
Shone the old answer back, "The cause of God
can never die!"

And lo! my grandsire greeted them with his
olden gracious hail;
No one marvelled to meet him there, it seemed,
in the Happy Vale!

But I remained—loud thunder rolled, and wrapt
them from my sight . . .
The hurricane roared across the veld, into the
pitchy night.

But in my soul 'twas Easter Day! I knew the
joy divine
Of those that share with more than earth the
heavenly Bread and Wine!

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PEACE

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June 1902

PEACE? Peace? with starting weary eyes
The women look each other in the face—
There's shouting in the camp! and sobs, and cries!
Peace, then, at last!
Let us thank God for Peace!

Tell not this hour of reckonings asked and given!
Count not to-night the hearts for whom too late
Is peace on earth . . . they hear the cry in heaven!
Peace, then, at last!
Let us thank God for Peace!

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Sunset

SUNSET! and in a cloudless winter sky
The sun goes down, upon a world at peace!
The lingering crowds disperse; the shoutings die:
I turn at last into my tent, and cry
Like to a child that nothing can appease,
And lean my lonely arms on Ouma's knees!

Digitized by Google

O Sad-Eyed Peace

O SAD-EYED Peace,
Implored in vain,
Frighted afar
By blood and war,
Return, and make thy home with us again!

Thy outstretched hands
Are bleeding yet;
Thy feet are torn,
Thy garments worn
With dust and tears, thou canst not yet forget!

O brooding Peace,
Banished so long!
Forgive, forgive
These hearts that grieve,
Checking their grief to hail thee with a song!

Digitized by Google

We have no palms,
  No gifts to bring,
And lay as meet
Before thy feet,
But a People's heart, made great by suffering!

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The Predikant

OCTOBER 1902.

THE Camp dissolves each day: the men return
Back to the ruins of the broken hearth,
Back to the wasted land their fathers won!
Back to the desert that was once a home!

Three hundred landed yesternight, they say,
And Koos will soon be here! Nonnie, I know,
Is safe with Chris, and with the children; ah!
Will they remember me? So long ago?
I pant, and scarcely can await the hour,
Now that the word is given! O little ones!
Innocent prattlers, come and let me hide
The tears and ashes of old memories
For ever in your bosoms, nourishing there
The little tender hope that still remains,
And yet shall blossom!

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What was that, last night,
The Predikant declared, his hoary head
Lifted among the people where he stood,
White in the morning sun?

"My children, hear!
Hath He not said He never will forsake
And leave His own? So is it even now!
He goes before us! Chosen still, we bear
The cross of an affliction that He knew!
Was He not too beneath an alien yoke,
To show Himself of every bondage free,
In all things conqueror? Did He not allow
The might of Cæsar, paying Cæsar's toll
Without despair, though mightier than he?
The spirit changes not with name and tongue!
Sons of the soil! your life remains to you!
And shall remain! absorbing weaker things,
Conforming all unto the inner Power;
For they that live by faith can never die!"

He spoke, and all the people listening stood,
And hope shone in their faces—yea, through
tears!

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The Return

NOVEMBER 1902.

IS this the place? Under the bleaching sun
The land lies desolate, and black and bare;
The tangled teazles mock the empty fields,
And scatter wasteful seeds into the air.

"Lead me, lead me out to the old barn door!"
Said Ouma, trembling, as she took my hand.
I helped her from the waggon, o'er the heaped
And broken stones that lay about the land.

The barn was standing roofless; but its walls
Were solid to the heavens! How could she
Have known they stood? Her feeble knotty hand
She passed upon the door-jamb silently.

"It is the same! I know it! Here it was
There came the voice of God, and bade me stay!
'Here thou shalt live and here shalt die,' He said:
His word remains, though nations pass away!

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"'Tis Koos must build me now a coffin-chest,
The third prepared for me!—the last, I trow!
The first I gave to take poor Carel's child,
The last was burnt that day—how long ago?"

I led her back. Lo! where the cling-stone peach
Hung once above the shed, and made a bower,
The giant aloes of a hundred years
Had burst its bud, and stood in lofty flower!

And underneath the matted ruined wall,
Heavy with honey-store of two long years,
The unmolested hives stood murmuring
The darkly gathered tale of the flowers' tears!

Heaven's messages, fitted with various speech,
Are uttered in our presence every day;
But only souls with open ears, attuned
To life and death, can hear the words they say!

Koos is building yonder in the werf,
Cleaving a mighty limb of yellow-wood;
And Nonnie stands, and watches wearily,
Staring apart, in strange and bitter mood.

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Lotta rocks her poppie in the shade,
But Nonnie chides her, with a gesture wild:
Will Nonnie ne'er forget? and shall I see
Never on Nonnie's lap a cradled child?

Within my heart a strange exultant song
Sings no defeat, but victory instead:
For all its woe, the "way was worth the while!"
Thank God, we could have done but what we
    did!

By day I toil and stir . . . Only at eve
Out on the veld the sunset hour I crave;
And hear a little voice among the sheep,
That leads me to a little far-off grave;
And my heart goes down, and rests awhile with
    him
Who sleeps so still, under the ocean-wave!

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NOTES

ENGELA and Piet are representatives of the Huguenot and the Dutch elements in South Africa. They are descendants of the Celt and the Teuton, who for generations past have lived side by side, and intermarried under the impulse of a common faith and a common cause.

The incidents in the tale are true in the high sense of the word; many of them are founded on fact, and are faithful to the smallest details.

The country described is that of the North and Mid-Transvaal, where the vegetation is half tropical; and where, on the higher slopes, every variety of climate is found.

Piet . .	pronounced .	Peet.
Engela . .	„ .	Eng-ellah, *with hard g.*
Koos . .	„ .	Kose, *as in dose.*
Geert . .	„ .	Gairt.
Welbedacht .	„ .	Velberdacht, *with broad ā, as in the German ach!*
Jaapie . .	„ .	Yahpie.
Jan. . .	„ .	Yannh.

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GLOSSARY

Ouma . . .	Grandmother.
Drift . . .	A ford.
Landdrost . .	Corresponding to the magistrate of a district; a registrar.
Yellow tulip . .	A veld-plant highly injurious to cattle.
Vlei	Pronounced *flay;* a marsh; a large pool of water frequent in desert districts, and, according to some geologists, fed by underground caverns; water is found in them in the heat of summer.
Cow-mist . . .	Cow-dung used for burning.
Widow's son . .	It was not required of a widow to send her eldest son to the war; nor of any boys to bear arms under the age of sixteen.
Stripping mealie-cobs	The maize-ears are hung in rows to dry, the outer sheath being stripped back to form a handle or balancing weight over the lines.
September 1900 .	The annexation of the Transvaal.
Spruit . . .	A stream in a rocky bed, often intermittent in summer.
Passing maize grains from hand to hand	A method used in counting herds.
Kartel . . .	Bed-frame made for a waggon.

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Powder in her pocket	Pepper powder carried as a means of defence by Dutch women in wild districts, to throw into the eyes of insolent Kaffirs.
Meer-kat . . .	Ant-eater.
Donga . . .	A deep channel worn by the great rains ; a gorge.
Werf . . .	Building-yard.
Morgen . . .	A measure of land, about two acres.
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